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KGB may have taken Soviet writer out of London, ex-CIA director says ^{STAT}

By Ed Blanche
Associated Press

LONDON — Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner said yesterday that a Soviet journalist who spent the last year in Britain and then surfaced in Moscow on Tuesday accusing the British of kidnapping him may have been smuggled from London by the KGB.

Turner said journalist Oleg Bitov, who vanished from his London hide-out Aug. 16 and turned up Tuesday in Moscow at a news conference, was probably forced to make the accusations against the British "or die."

"I'm sure they [the KGB] would have used torture too, if necessary, to get him to make his television appearance," Turner said in a telephone interview from the United States with Independent Radio News, a network that feeds commercial radio stations in Britain. The interview was broadcast on Capitol Radio in London.

The British government has said that Bitov had defected and been granted asylum in Britain after he disappeared on Sept. 9, 1983, while covering the Venice Film Festival. Britain protested strongly to Moscow after Bitov, 52, denied Tuesday that he had defected willingly. A Home Office statement branded Bitov's assertion that he was snatched in Venice by British agents as "absurd and offensive."

Turner said, "I would by no means rule out his having been drugged, locked up in some kind of a crate and taken out of Great Britain surreptitiously."

"We all know that you've had a case of that with a different country recently. The Soviets would have been much more skillful in clearing it up."

Turner was referring to an abortive attempt to smuggle former Nigerian Transport Minister Umaru Dikko, drugged, out of Britain in a crate July 5. A Nigerian and three Israelis have been charged with kidnapping him.

Turner said Bitov, former foreign cultural editor of Moscow's Literaturnaya Gazeta, or Literary Gazette,

"from now on has no future ahead of him. He certainly isn't going to be re-employed in his old job. I think he's lucky if he avoids a prison camp in Siberia."

Four days after Bitov vanished from his London apartment last month, his car was found parked near the Soviet Embassy in London.

"He was settling in very nicely to quite an expensive lifestyle," said a British intelligence source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But he missed his wife and daughter very much." Bitov's wife and daughter were in the Soviet Union when Bitov disappeared in Italy.

"It seems likely that he was lured back to Moscow. His press conference had a dual purpose — to blacken our intelligence service and to discourage potential Soviet defectors," the British intelligence source said.

The source declined to say how the return of Bitov, viewed as a "significant defector" because of his links with top officials in Moscow, would affect Britain's chilly relations with the Soviet Union.

Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe was scheduled to meet Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko

later this month in New York at the U.N. General Assembly. Gromyko also has an invitation to visit London next year.

The source dismissed the possibility that Bitov had been placed as a spy in the West by the KGB, the Soviet secret police and intelligence agency.

In Moscow, the gazette for which Bitov worked devoted a full page yesterday to his reappearance there and said Bitov soon would reveal more. It said Bitov would return to work for the gazette, although he may not regain the high post of foreign culture editor with the right to travel abroad.

In Britain, the Daily Mail said that Bitov identified seven alleged British operatives and two safe houses in London and that his return to Moscow had caused "considerable consternation to British intelligence."

Duff Hart-Davis, a writer with the Sunday Telegraph, edited some of the anti-Soviet articles Bitov had written when he was in Britain. Hart-Davis said, "One of his favorite phrases concerned 'the unmatched pleasure' of being free. His friends ... feel certain that he was abducted or at the very least enticed."